



During the afternoon session, Hermi Cubillos, standing, and others with the Pima County InterFaith Council, urge the City Council to cut spending evenly. Some outside agencies were cut 60 percent, others 20 percent.

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Council OKs furloughs for all city employees

Time off to include fire, police; Access Tucson slashed 60%

By Rob O'Dell

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

After initially voting to delay budget cuts to balance the budget Tuesday afternoon, the City Council reversed direction hours later and approved furloughs for all city employees at its night meeting.

On a 6-0 vote, the council rejected a proposed cut in premium pay — a series of bonuses for special skills or job assignments — that would have saved another \$1.3 million.

The council unanimously reaffirmed last week's tentative approval of furloughs, meaning cuts of 3.5 percent to all city employees, including police and fire, which were exempt from the previous round of furloughs. Employees are likely to get between four and five more days off without pay before June 30, saving the city about \$4 million.

City Manager Mike Letcher proposed a 50 percent cut to employee premium pay — which includes extra city pay such as executive vehicle allowance, downtown parking allowance, on-call pay, tuition reimbursement, longevity pay, second-language pay, shift differential, police and fire sick-leave buyback, and numerous other police- and fire-only premium pay.

The evening vote came after a 4-3 vote in the afternoon by the council to put the furloughs and premium pay issue off for one week, after an hours-long, back-and-forth discussion.

By the numbers

\$4.9 million

Starting deficit 2010 on Tuesday

\$2.4 million

Remaining 2010 deficit

Cuts/revenue increases rejected:

\$1.3 million

in employee premium pay

\$100,000

from increasing taxes on land for

home builders

Cuts made/revenues increased:

\$1 million

extra from cutting most outside

agencies by 60 percent

\$900,000

by charging more for ambulance

service

\$500,000

by changing overtime policy (vote

occurs next week)

\$200,000

cut to outside consultants

The council agreed to the delay after city employee labor unions made an alternative proposal to balance the budget during the afternoon meeting.

Council members Rodney Glassman, Shirley Scott and Richard Fimbres voted against the delay. Councilwoman Regina Romero attended the afternoon session by phone but didn't attend the night meeting.

At the evening session, Councilman Steve Kozachik said he and others met with employee unions between the sessions to craft the plan that would allow for the furloughs but no more cuts to employee compensation, leading to the about-face.

"During the break we found consensus with the labor council," Kozachik said.

The council also voted to institute a 60 percent cut to most outside agencies, and a 20 percent cut to most of the rest.

At night, the council also voted 5-1 to reject a plan to include the cost of raw land when calculating the taxable gross income of speculative home builders, contending the plan was anti-business. Councilwoman Karin Uhlich voted no.

For the outside agencies, the council voted to cut the Tucson Downtown Partnership, but moved it from the 60-percent reduction group to the 20-percent category.

It also voted to consolidate all outside agency arts funding and give it to the Tucson-Pima Arts Council, which would then give the money out. Arts Council Executive Director Roberto Bedoya said he had no idea what the council's move means for arts groups or TPAC, other than to give the arts council more responsibilities.

The biggest impact of outside agency cuts could be on Access Tucson, which had its funding for the rest of the year cut, potentially shutting the station down.

Uhlich tried to get the council to cut the city's Tucson12.tv by 30 percent and have it combine with Access Tucson, but was voted down 4-3, with Romero and Fimbres supporting her in the losing cause.

Instead, the council will cut Access Tucson by 60 percent and will consider consolidating Access Tucson and Channel 12 at a meeting in late February.

Several speakers turned out in the evening to protest the cuts to Access Tucson. Executive Director Sam Behrend said he didn't know if the station could make it financially until the February council hearing where it could be combined with Tucson 12.

Some City Council members said combining the two entities could mean selling off Access Tucson's building on East Broadway and South Sixth Avenue to make way for private development, and to help close the city's deficit.

Behrend said he will try to work with the city but is worried about the viability of Access Tucson. "There is no funding," Behrend said. "What is clear is our funding has been cut to zero. The rest isn't clear."

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